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Cc. The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs  
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Cc. The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20520

Cc. Federica Mogherini  
High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Cc. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

2 September 2016

### **Urgent Appeal for the Release of Human Rights Defender Nabeel Rajab**

Your Excellency,

In light of recent alarming events in Bahrain, the undersigned NGOs express our deepest concerns about the ongoing detention of prominent human rights defender **Nabeel Rajab** based on his peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression. We urge the government of Bahrain to immediately and unconditionally release Rajab.

On 13 June 2016, the authorities arrested Rajab, who serves as President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), Founding Director of the regional Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR), Deputy Secretary-General of FIDH, and a member of the Advisory Committee of Human Rights Watch's Middle East Division. Rajab's arrest is one in a series of repressive actions to severely restrict the work of human rights defenders and civil society members in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

In the wake of an unprecedented crackdown, we believe the detention of Rajab to be an act of reprisal for his work to promote fundamental human rights in Bahrain, as well as a means to restrict Rajab's freedom of expression and speech. He is charged for tweets and re-tweets about allegations of torture in Bahrain's Jau Prison, which were investigated by many local and international NGOs, and about the widely reported and criticised human rights violations during the war in Yemen. In total, Rajab could serve up to 15 years in prison for his statements via Twitter.

Rajab faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted of spreading “false or malicious news, statements, or rumours” under article 133 of Bahrain’s penal code; a further two years imprisonment if convicted under article 215 of the penal code for “offending a foreign country [Saudi Arabia]” for tweets related to the Saudi-led war in Yemen and an additional three-year sentence if convicted of “offending a statutory body” under article 216 of the penal code for comments relating to Jau prison in Bahrain.

In addition to these charges, he may also face a trial on charges of “spreading false news” for similar statements made during televised interviews last year. That case has not yet been referred to court, but is believed to have served, among others, for his arrest on 13 June.

Due to the poor detention conditions, Rajab’s health has been severely deteriorating since the time of his arrest. He continues to be held at West Riffa police station and family visits are being monitored very closely, according to his lawyers. His cell does not meet the requirements for long-term detention and the sanitary facilities are unhygienic. He has lost eight kilos since his arrest. Rajab has chronic inflammation in his lower back requiring urgent surgery, which has been delayed by the authorities until early September. In addition, he is also suffering from an irregular heartbeat, which has decreased below the normal range during his detention, and has also suffered from chest pains recently, having required a visit to the clinic. Despite the fact that he requires urgent medical treatment, prison authorities do not appear to provide sufficient medical assistance for most of these ailments. In the meantime, Rajab is dependent on his family to provide him with painkillers and bandages for his bleeding due to his ulcer.

Following his arrest, Rajab’s case has received widespread international attention by government officials and UN dignitaries, *inter alia*, by the [spokesperson](#) of the US State Department, the [spokesperson](#) of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, as well as by [members](#) of the European Parliament, who adopted an urgent resolution condemning the Bahraini authorities’ crackdown on civil society and on the political opposition.

As a signatory to international human rights conventions, the Government of Bahrain is bound to guarantee the right to freedom of expression for all in Bahrain, including Nabeel Rajab. Depriving Rajab of his liberty for peaceful social media posts goes against Bahrain’s commitment to uphold these international conventions and raises the question of its ability to respect its legal obligations within the wider international community.

To date, the government in Bahrain has repeatedly demonstrated unwillingness to comply with international legal standards, despite promises made at the United Nations during its Universal Periodic Review, and during its own national inquiry, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI).

We therefore urge you to abide by the principles of democracy and human rights and to safeguard freedom of expression in Bahrain, as enshrined in international human rights legislation, by dropping all charges against the human rights defender, Nabeel Rajab and ensure his immediate and unconditional release.

Sincerely,

Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)  
Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR)  
Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)  
Bahrain Press Association (BPA)  
Brian Dooley, Human Rights First  
Canadian Journalists for Free Expression  
CIVICUS  
Committee for the Respect of Liberties in Tunisia  
English PEN  
European-Bahraini Organisation for human rights (EBOHR)  
European Center for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)  
FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders  
Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)  
Human Rights Sentinel  
IFEX  
Index on Censorship  
International Press Institute (IPI)  
Jesper Højberg, Executive Director, International Media Support  
Kham Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture  
Lawyers Rights Watch Canada  
Libya Al-Mostakbal Centre for Media & Culture  
MADA Palestinian Center for Development & Media Freedoms  
Maharat Foundation  
Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH)  
No Peace Without Justice  
Pakistan Press Foundation  
Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)  
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)  
Salam for Democracy and Human Rights  
Tunis Centre for Press Freedom  
Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH)  
Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights  
Vigilance for Democracy and the Civic State  
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders